

FE Week

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ON GCSES**



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Sector trio up for BBC Sports Personality of the Year fame

SP14
SPORTS PERSONALITY OF THE YEAR 2014

By Rebecca Jones

The BBC Young Sports Personality of the Year award could be heading FE and skills' way after a series of impressive performances at the Glasgow Commonwealth Games this summer.

Loughborough College 18-year-old Sophie Thornhill, a level three sports learner, is one of three sector learners up for the award. She won two golds in the tandem sprint and 1,000-metre time-trial B2 cycling events for visually-impaired competitors.

A-level learner Alicia Blagg, 18, who attended Leeds-based Notre Dame Catholic Sixth Form College, won the 3m synchronised diving competition and is also among the nominees.

And completing the sector trio is former A-level student at Yorkshire's Prior Pursglove College Jade Jones, 18, who graduated in June. She took home bronze from the women's wheelchair 1500-metre competition.

They figure in a shortlist of ten athletes, all aged 17 or under as of January 1 this year. The awards are due to be televised on Sunday (December 14).

Main photo: Jade Jones competing at the Tee's Pride 10k run held in Middlesbrough. Inset from left: Sophie Thornhill and Alicia Blagg holding their gold medals at this year's Commonwealth games held in Glasgow



BANK OF BIS LAUNCHES EMERGENCY COLLEGE LOANS

@REBECCAACOONEY
REBECCA.COONEY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

General FE colleges turned away by the banks and facing financial meltdown have been thrown a possible lifeline with a new system of emergency loans from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

The rules for "exceptional financial support" were released on Thursday (December 4) and provide hope for a last chance source of funding for cash-strapped colleges. They outline "short-term" loans of up to three months' repayment and "medium-term" loans to be repaid with a year.

Both options leave colleges open to the risk of financial notices of concern being issued by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and a possible visit from FE Commissioner Dr David

Collins — whether loans are granted or not.

Meanwhile, even just the application for a "longer term" loan, with no repayment schedule, will see the SFA issue a financial notice of concern and send in Dr Collins.

The new loans system was welcomed by Association of Colleges chief executive Martin Doel and 157 Group executive director Dr Lynne Sedgmore, who both pointed to the effect of government funding cuts on college finances.

"Following significant funding reductions from government, some colleges are inevitably experiencing financial difficulties," Mr Doel told *FE Week*.

"Therefore, giving them access to loans to facilitate recovery is a welcome move from BIS. However, we have also been calling for an 'innovation fund' through which colleges

can proactively look at options that further enhance their ability to respond to the needs of employers and local communities."

Dr Sedgmore said: "The very fact exceptional support is being made available is a sign of the extent to which college funding has been disproportionately targeted over recent years.

"We will be monitoring the uptake as an indication of the financial stability of the sector to inform our very serious discussions with ministers and others in the coming weeks."

Indeed, it comes with the vast majority of Dr Collins's 13 published college inspections having been triggered by financial problems identified by the SFA.

Nevertheless, it is understood the loans, not on offer to sixth form colleges, replace the SFA system of advances which, according to the

rules document, "will be converted to the new arrangements".

And they will also have "greater transparency" than advances with successful applications having passed the SFA, BIS, the Department for Education, the Education Funding Agency, Ofsted and Dr Collins himself.

A BIS spokesperson said: "The guidance is primarily about introducing greater transparency and setting out the steps BIS and the SFA will take where a general FE college declares that it is encountering financial weaknesses which it cannot resolve from its own resources or through its usual borrowing facilities."

She said no loan had yet been given out.

See editor's comment on page 6



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Learning & Skills Events, Consultancy and Training Ltd

161-165 Greenwich High Road

London SE10 8JA

T: 020 8123 4778

E: news@feweek.co.uk

PROFESSOR WOLF TELLS OF ‘UNEASE’ AT 16-19 GCSE EXEMPTION

@REBECCAKCOONEY
REBECCA.COONEY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Study programmes architect Professor Alison Wolf has warned that a Department for Education (DfE) English and maths qualification exemption could mean 16 to 19-year-olds miss out on “the single most useful thing they could achieve”.

The King’s College London academic said she was “uneasy” about the potential results of a government decision that learners without A* to C grade maths and English GCSEs, on programmes consisting of less than 150 hours, did not have to study towards passes.

Professor Wolf (pictured) said study programmes — a combination of vocational learning and maths and English GCSE requirements for 16 to 19-year-olds — had been designed with full-time students in mind.

“But I really hope they are going to monitor it,” she told *FE Week*.

“I’d be a bit uneasy if we found, a year from now, that no one on a programme of less than 150 hours ever took a GCSE.

“If someone is close to getting their English or maths, doing so might well be the single most useful thing they could achieve.”

She added: “I think that, as long as they are still expected to do some English and maths, it is reasonable, because standalone qualifications will tend to



either need quite a lot of time, or not be worth taking really.”

It was Professor Wolf’s Review of vocational education, published in March 2011, that called for 16 to 19-year-olds who had not achieved a C or above in English or maths GCSE to keep studying toward the qualifications, alongside their vocational programmes.

Although the Department for Education (DfE) accepted her recommendation, Skills Minister Nick Boles used his speech at the Association of Colleges conference last month to announce he was exempting learners studying for less than 150 hours from the rule.

The announcement was confirmed by the maths and English condition of funding guidance, published on Thursday (December 4) and comes into effect immediately.

A DfE spokesperson denied Professor Wolf’s policy was being “watered down”.

“We want to support those individuals who might work part-time or have caring responsibilities and are considering a route back into education through short or part time evening courses,” he said.

“This policy will allow the small number of 16 to 19-year-olds taking these types of courses to focus on the core elements of the subject they are studying.”

He added that of the 1.2 million 16 to 19-year-olds in FE, around 30,000 are studying courses below 150 planned hours in an academic year — around 2 per cent.

Cable acts on apprentice rule after legal threat

@FCDWHITTAKER
FWHITTAKER@FEWEEK.CO.UK

A “five-year rule” forcing early years apprentices to re-sit for qualifications they already had could be scrapped after a provider threatened to take the government to court.

Business Secretary Vince Cable has agreed “in principle” to scrap the rule in the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (Sase), which requires all level two and three apprentices to hold English and maths qualifications less than five years old.

The Sase is used to dictate the minimum standards for apprenticeship frameworks, and although the five-year rule applies to all frameworks, most allow learners to take more applied qualifications, such as Functional Skills.

But independent learning provider PBDevelopment launched judicial review proceedings after it was discovered that, coupled with the removal of Functional Skills as an option from the new early years educator (EYE) framework in August, the five-year rule made it “impossible for anyone over 21 to complete an early years apprenticeship”.

Ross Midgley, PBDevelopment director (pictured), welcomed Dr



Cable’s announcement and has agreed to pause his legal action for six months.

But he demanded changes to the EYE framework, which was developed by the National College for Teaching and Leadership, to improve participation among older learners.

He said: “Amending Sase is just the first step. What the government now needs to do is amend the early years apprenticeship framework that was made under Sase, because this makes it impossible for anyone over 21 to complete an early years apprenticeship.

“In GCSE English, unlike maths, candidates must undertake a series of controlled assessments, which have to be sat under exam conditions in a school. For work based candidates, this is just not possible.”

A spokesperson for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills said: “The government is considering modifying the Sase so that the requirement that GCSEs in English and maths at grade B or C must have been achieved in the five years prior to the start of a level two or level three apprenticeship is removed.

“The chief executive

Min wage abuse shame

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has named and shamed 25 employers for failing to pay the minimum wage — and more than one was an apprentice pay offender.

A BIS spokesperson confirmed several of the companies had paid its learner workers less than £2.73 an-hour.

The full list of underpaying employers, who collectively owe workers more than £89,000 and have been fined more than £36,000, is available on feweek.co.uk.

Loans response delayed

The government’s response to its FE loans consultation has been delayed until the New Year.

The official response to the two-month future development of FE loans consultation, which closed on August 21, had been expected November 13.

However, a spokesperson for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), which is looking at extending the loans system, said: “We are taking the time necessary to fully analyse a diverse set of responses. We will publish the response early in the New Year.”

Website testing due soon

A new Skills Funding Agency (SFA) apprenticeship application website called Find an Apprenticeship is due to launch for a public testing phase shortly.

The SFA said the new site, which will allow people to search, register and apply for apprenticeships and traineeships, would be “simpler and more intuitive”.

It will run alongside the existing apprenticeship vacancy matching service website as part of a beta testing phase before full launch in March.

Visit feweek.co.uk for more details.

of the Skills Funding Agency will be asked to prepare draft modifications to Sase. Once these have been received and approved, secondary legislation will be required to give effect to the changes.”

A spokesperson for the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) welcomed the news, but said the government should also reconsider proposed changes to the framework that will make English and maths GCSEs an entry requirement for early years apprenticeships from next August.

He said: “The five-year rule is not applied in other apprenticeship programmes and should be dropped for EYE programmes. Furthermore, it is not a requirement if learners do the stand-alone diploma outside of an apprenticeship framework.

“We remain though very concerned about the potential impact on apprenticeship recruitment by nurseries if the government maintains that from August 2015, GCSEs in English and maths, at grade C or above, will be required on entry to an early years apprenticeship.

“Again, in every other level three apprenticeship framework, the requirement for level two English and maths is an exit requirement rather than an entry one and Functional Skills are a valid and well respected alternative to GCSE.”

Gazelle departures prompt membership review

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Three colleges have revealed plans to leave the Gazelle College Group this month, taking the total number quitting before next year to four.

The departures will reduce the organisation to 19 members with its £35,000 annual membership fee understood to have proven difficult to justify for colleges unable to point to independent research highlighting any return on investment.

It has prompted a review of membership at Gazelle, with chief executive Fintan Donohue revealing to *FE Week* that he was looking at “new ways of continuing our association with colleges who share our agenda, but are not at the current time able to commit to a full membership”.

Middlesbrough College, The Sheffield College and Peterborough Regional College all confirmed they would not be renewing memberships, just weeks after Gloucestershire College announced its plans to withdraw, claiming it could better spend its money elsewhere.

And Carlisle College, Lewisham Southwark College and Glasgow Kelvin College said they were yet to make decisions on their future membership.

Middlesbrough College principal Zoe



Fintan Donohue

Lewis told *FE Week*: “We have reviewed our subscription and I have let Fintan know that we are not going to be renewing at the end of the year, for lots of reasons.

“We have got an awful lot out of being a member, but it’s about what we pay for it and we think we can now go it alone through more informal networks.”

Heather MacDonald, chief executive of The Sheffield College, said: “We are a member of the Gazelle Group due to a mutual interest and expertise in enterprise skills and education, and that will continue until the end of this calendar year.

“We value our membership of Gazelle and have derived considerable benefit from it. In a tougher financial climate we are exploring a different relationship with Gazelle short of



Zoe Lewis

full membership in the future.”

A spokesperson for Peterborough Regional College, said: “Our principal, Angela Joyce, has written to Fintan that we have terminated our membership for the Gazelle College Group. To confirm, the college continues as a member until the current membership period ends at the end of the calendar year.”

Gazelle members Cambridge Regional College, Activate Learning, Amersham and Wycombe College, Gateshead College and Preston’s College confirmed they would renew.

When asked if they planned to renew, Highbury College, Warwickshire College, North Hertfordshire College, City College Norwich, Cardiff and Vale College, Plymouth

College, New College Nottingham and City of Bath College only confirmed they would be members for the “foreseeable future”.

City of Liverpool College, South West College and Barking and Dagenham College declined to comment.

It comes after Gazelle came under fire from the University and College Union as *FE Week* revealed earlier this year that colleges had spent £3.5m on membership of the group and its services between January 2012 and June of this year.

Mr Donohue, who at the time defended the large amounts pumped in by colleges, told *FE Week* Gazelle’s membership situation had always “evolved”.

He said: “Some colleges do not feel able to continue full membership of Gazelle next year. We have greatly valued their support in advancing a shared ambition to put entrepreneurship at the heart of college operations and the student experience.

“The vast majority of our members, in spite of competing priorities, have indicated an ongoing commitment to full membership.

“The difficult financial climate for our sector means that colleges are necessarily re-evaluating spending decisions. We are investigating new ways of continuing our association with colleges who share our agenda but are not at the current time able to commit to a full membership.”

Principal of cash-strapped college backs ‘look at finances’ plea for Ofsted

@PAULOFFORD
PAUL.OFFORD@FEWEEK.CO.UK

The principal of a college recovering from financial difficulties has backed FE Commissioner Dr David Collins in his view that Ofsted could “be more useful” in looking at bank balances.

Mark Robertson (pictured), from City of Wolverhampton College, which was visited by Dr Collins in May over Skills Funding Agency (SFA) concerns about finances, said he wanted inspectors to take a closer look at the books.

Mr Robertson’s 10,000-learner college, complimented by Dr Collins on its financial progress, was rated by Ofsted as good overall, with leadership good as well, late last month. The college’s previous Ofsted inspection, in May last year, resulted in a “requires improvement” rating. “I agree with Dr Collins that Ofsted should look in more detail at the financial position of colleges,” said Mr Robertson. “For example, if a new leadership team puts the mechanisms in place to improve the finances, which is what the FE Commissioner recognised that we have done, that should be considered fully by Ofsted, to make its reports even more helpful.”

Dr Collins’s comments about Ofsted last month came after it rated leadership at Birmingham’s Bournville College outstanding and good overall, despite a “critical cash position,” as later identified by the commissioner.

It also emerged that the SFA issued the college with a notice of concern a month before Ofsted went in,

but inspectors avoided financial issues in their report and indeed praised the leadership.

Acting principal Mike Hill said: “Ofsted judged leadership and management outstanding because it felt our financial situation did not impact on teaching and learning.” Ofsted, under the previous common inspection framework, replaced from 2012/13, used to carry out inspections with the SFA’s provider financial assurance team and their findings were given to inspectors. Ofsted argues that it doesn’t now look “directly” at finances, although a number of reports have covered the issue — including Wolverhampton’s, which complimented financial progress at the college. Another one, on Central Sussex College last month, praised “governors’ thorough scrutiny and careful monitoring of the college’s financial position” but still handed out the college’s second consecutive grade three overall result.

Principal Sarah Wright said: “We welcome Ofsted’s recognition of the improved financial management of our new senior team and board of governors.”

An Ofsted spokesperson said: “We may on occasion and where it is appropriate refer to a provider’s financial position as a factor in its overall governance and its ability to ensure sustainable good quality provision for learners.”

Meanwhile, Merseyside-based King George V College, a sixth form college with around 1,000 learners, slumped from a 2012 grade two rating to inadequate last month. A college spokesperson said: “We’ve noted the report’s recommendations and are now moving to action them.”



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Red tape reduction efforts need ‘democratic scrutiny’

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The failure of a government plan to make any major dent in £300m of FE and skills sector red tape costs for providers has prompted a call for “democratic scrutiny” to ensure greater progress in cutting bureaucracy.

The House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee should, it has been suggested, investigate in light of a National Audit Office (NAO) probe that found the Simplification Plan had shaved less than 2 per cent of the cost of complying with funding, qualifications and assurance requirements.

The plan was produced by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in 2012, but according to NAO head Amyas Morse, it had “not significantly cut the cost incurred by hard-pressed providers”.

“Despite some progress there is still too much red tape,” he said, adding: “BIS, working with the Department for Education [DfE], needs to consider more radical ways to simplify complex funding arrangements.”

Dr Lynne Sedgmore (pictured), 157 Group chief executive, told *FE Week*: “We are not surprised by these findings. Our members report that their administrative burdens have barely changed in recent years. As they rightly prioritise teaching and learning with less and less funding, dealing with an overly complex policy environment is extremely unhelpful.

“We would support



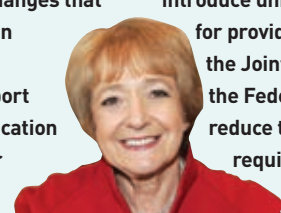
Funding ‘diverted away from learners’

Public Accounts Committee chair Margaret Hodge has spoken of her “frustration” at attempts by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to reduce £300m of FE and skills sector red tape.

Ms Hodge (pictured) said: “I am incredibly frustrated that the efforts of BIS to cut bureaucracy have not reduced the admin burden faced by the FE sector. I am deeply concerned that public money is being spent on unnecessary admin and diverted away from learners.

“The department needs to do a great deal more to understand how much it will cost for providers to comply with further changes that might lead to an even greater admin burden.”

But the National Audit Office report that identified how the BIS Simplification Plan had shaved off less than 2 per cent of bureaucracy costs, also



made five recommendations.

It said BIS should improve the quality of information on compliance costs imposed by funding and assurance bodies; work with the Department for Education (DfE) to publish a document that clarifies the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the various oversight bodies; and, work with the DfE to find more radical ways to simplify the complex funding arrangements.

It also said BIS should ensure that forthcoming changes are implemented consistently with policy aims, but do not introduce unnecessary complexities and costs for providers; and should work with Ofqual, the Joint Council for Qualifications and the Federation of Awarding Bodies to reduce the variation in administrative requirements placed on providers by the awarding organisations.

calls for progress with the simplification agenda to be democratically scrutinised, perhaps by the select committee.”

Mikki Draggoo, director of corporate relations at City & Guilds, said: “The intention was to make the system clearer and reduce costs. The report shows this didn’t happen and FE providers were put to one side — despite it being designed for them in the first place.”

She added: “The BIS select committee should conduct its own inquiry into the skills and employment system.”

BIS select committee chair Adrian Bailey

(pictured front) said: “It is astounding that something [Simplification Plan] which set out to achieve so much has achieved so little.

“My instinct is we wouldn’t launch a full inquiry into this, not least because we are running out of days before Parliament dissolves. But what I think we will do when we have the ministers in to talk about the annual report and accounts is raise questions about this.”

The NAO report, released on Thursday (December 4), said a “much more serious effort” was needed from BIS and pointed out the plan was “not a strategic stocktake of where simplification might have the greatest impact” and that providers themselves had “little voice” in its development.

Martin Doel, chief executive of the Association of Colleges (AoC), said: “All unnecessary bureaucracy needs to be removed so the maximum resource can be focused on students rather than red tape.”

Stewart Segal, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), said: “The NAO report is welcome because it highlights how providers are often delivering similar programmes, particularly for young people, for three different government departments, ie DfE, BIS and the Department for Work and Pensions, which require different procurement and contracting processes.

“This inevitably has significant cost implications. We continue to call for more alignment of cross government programmes and the need for an environment where more resources are focused on delivery.”

A BIS spokesperson said: “We have made good progress in removing and reducing bureaucracy for FE providers. Funding and inspection systems have been streamlined and providers tell us that this has had a positive impact.

“We will carry on working with the sector to reduce bureaucracy while driving up the quality of FE provision and making it more responsive to the needs of learners and employers.”

The Simplification Plan review

- The National Audit Office (NAO) reports on FE and skills bureaucracy in December 2011, estimating the cost to be around £250m to £300m. It calls on the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to streamline demands on providers

- Public Accounts Committee (PAC) subsequently critical of “government bodies imposing conflicting funding, qualification and assurance systems”. Burden of red tape “diverts money away from learners,” it says

- BIS rejects PAC recommendation for “single funding system” incorporating BIS and Department for Education (DfE) spending, but responds in 2012 with cross-government Simplification Plan containing 42 separate actions across 10 bodies

- However, NAO says plan “was not a strategic stocktake of where simplification might have the greatest impact” and that “providers had little voice in developing it”. Nor did plan “estimate net savings”

- BIS “does not know the overall cost to providers of complying with assurance activities and therefore cannot say whether compliance costs are rising or falling”

- The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) was only body that tried to quantify compliance costs, but “ultimately decided to abandon the exercise”

- Thirty of the 42 actions were achieved by September last year, including Education Funding Agency funding by programme of study rather than qualification and SFA efforts to publish “earlier and clearer set of funding rules”

- The plan has “brought cost savings of around £4m” — but an evaluation of the plan last year by BIS itself, according to the NAO, found most providers “felt the administrative burden was either worse than or no different” to before

- BIS and the Department for Education “not done enough together to streamline funding arrangements”

- “Scope” for more joined-up working between awarding organisations to reduce administrative requirements

- No assessment was made of administrative costs for introduction of FE loans, and NAO “saw no evidence” of red tape review for changes to traineeships and apprenticeships

- New stakeholder panel set up by BIS to look at “bureaucratic burden” of reforms, but “we found little evidence of its impact on how proposed changes were implemented”

- NAO concludes that plan was a “modest response ... to over-complexity in the FE and skills sector”. It adds: “A much more serious effort, led by BIS, is needed to meet PAC concerns and deliver better value for money in a sector already hard-pressed.”



SUZANNE DUNCAN
Principal of East Durham College

‘I don’t see that the costs have been reduced in any shape or form’

The National Audit Office (NAO) met with colleges, commercial and charitable providers, funding and oversight bodies, plus stakeholder and representative groups as part of its review of the Simplification Plan. Suzanne Duncan was among those consulted.

It was quite a thorough process and the auditors seemed to be pretty well-briefed. They were here for the day and started off with the senior team.

We talked through the challenges we face in the sector, particularly focusing on the adult skills budget, and in particular the inflexibilities we have experienced with requests to vire — from apprenticeships to classroom based skills training to meet engineering employers’ demands.

The team also met with our management information systems manager, who manages all our student records and exam entries, and she took them through the complexities

of the different funding rules and evidence requirements and how Skills Funding Agency and Education Funding Agency rules can often apply to learners on exactly the same courses simply depending on their age.

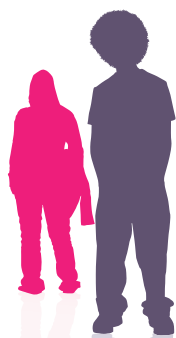
In things like performance measures, the Department for Education only covers students aged 16 to 18, but someone who comes to us well after their 19th birthday and is doing the same qualification in the same classroom isn’t included in those measures.

I don’t see that the costs have been reduced in any shape or form. I actually think there are now extra cost burdens placed on colleges.

For example, in evidencing learner destinations which has resulted in the college needing to commission a market research company to survey former students to verify their intended destination.

The NAO seemed like a very independent organisation and they did actually follow-up some of our specific points.

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FE WEEK COMMENT

Paying the principal and calling the tune

The new system of emergency loans for colleges fighting to survive is clearly a positive thing in offering genuine hope of a way through increasingly tough financial times.

It is difficult to have sympathy for principals and governors where weak or misguided decision-making has led a college into dire straits through foreign follies, unproven projects, or whatever.

Struggling to survive in the face of government funding cuts is quite another matter, however.

But common to every college under the cosh will be the threat hanging over the future of learners. They have most at stake here.

So the “greater transparency” promised by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) in shifting from a secretive system of Skills Funding Agency “advances” to “loans” is a wise move.

The range of key players involved in the application process should help ensure expert eyes are cast over troubled colleges sooner.

It will also mean greater scrutiny and therefore consideration of scarce public money heading, let’s not forget, to colleges facing the very real threat of going bust.

But also key are the BIS conditions tied up with the loans, which could well include following FE Commissioner advice to, for instance, sack leadership and governance.

He who pays the piper...

Chris Henwood
chris.henwood@feweek.co.uk

TOP AUTUMN STATEMENT TWEETS

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Great news for #apprentices in #AutumnStatement - help for business who employ apprentices with abolition of NIC

@McKellensLtd
Is now the time to employ an apprentice? National insurance abolished for young people doing apprenticeships

@jamestplunkett
Behind the spin the top 3 #AutumnStatement giveaways: stamp duty (£785m by 2019-20), personal allowance (£655m), and apprentice NICs (£125m)

@CeridwenHughes
Government to invest £20 million to improve careers advice & support for young people, but more detail needed

@joeAlane
£20 million for careers services... where to though?



Morgan rejects AoC manifesto call on A-levels

@REBECCA COONEY
REBECCA.COONEY@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Education Secretary Nicky Morgan has rejected an Association of College (AoC) manifesto call to keep AS-levels linked to A-levels.

Addressing MPs on the House of Commons Education Select Committee looking at exams for 15 to 19-year-olds in England on Wednesday (December 3), Ms Morgan (pictured front) defended plans to turn AS results into a separate qualification, making A-levels into a two-year course culminating in a single qualification.

Committee member Alex Cunningham asked Ms Morgan if she would reconsider the policy in light of the AoC manifesto, unveiled at its annual conference last month by president and Exeter College principal Richard Atkins (pictured).

The manifesto had called for the next government to “maintain AS-levels in their current form and should allow for rigorous modular assessment in vocational and academic qualifications, alongside final exams”.

However, Ms Morgan told the



committee she would not consider reversing the decision to split the qualifications.

“We have retained AS-levels — they have just been de-coupled from A-levels,” she said.

“I’m a fan of linear assessment, in terms having the time to study something properly, without the stress of continuous assessment.”

She acknowledged that in more practical courses some modular courses might be “absolutely necessary” but that in other courses “it is right to be assessed at the end of the course”.

Committee chair Graham Stuart and Mr Cunningham said they had heard “near-unanimous” opposition to splitting AS and A-levels from across the education sector.

They also pointed to evidence from colleges that requiring AS-levels to run alongside A-levels risked excluding students in disadvantaged areas.

However, Ms Morgan said: “I’m not sure I buy this argument about people being socially less able to do A-levels, this is part of our drive to raise the standards in education for all pupils.”

Mr Cunningham said: “Colleges tell us in many cases they can’t afford to teach both of them at the same time.”

The Education Secretary said this did not match up with the Department for Education’s “evidence and research”.

“We obviously listen to colleges and what they’re saying, but we are now funding colleges on a per student basis, with enough funding for 600 hours of teaching which should be enough to teach three linear A-levels and an AS-level, as well as a 150 hours for tutorial time, so we don’t think that’s an issue,” she said.

A consultation on GCSE and A-level reform ran from September 25 to November 20, although a response has not yet been published.

There is also an open consultation on the reforms in relation to religious studies, which closes on December 29.

Ms Morgan also defended the decision not to specifically include employers in the design of the new A-levels and GCSEs in the same way they have been consulted over apprenticeship reform, saying apprenticeships were “particularly employer-focussed”.

The committee has previously heard evidence from Ofqual as well as calling for written submissions from the education sector.

COMMENTS

AELP concerns over Labour’s apprenticeship policy

I know that people have short memories, but this is scraping the bottom of the barrel.

Labour changed the National Traineeship model (level two) in favour of the apprenticeship brand.

Here, after one spell of opposition they want to reintroduce the split between level two and level three?

Were they wrong to make the original change or is this selective amnesia?

The system isn’t broke so stop trying to fix it.

Matt Garvey

Flexibility plea after apprenticeships fall

Funding, funding, funding - this all boils down to the confusion of what is funded and who is funded.

Employers with inexperience of apprenticeship find this a minefield.

The commitment by employer regarding salary, NIC and everything else is not taken into account.

The SFA and government need to address this before the launch of new trailblazer funding comes into play.

I fear for the future of apprenticeships - £1500 incentives don’t cut it.

Tim K

£142m contractor top-slicing ‘extortionate’ 40 pc

No great surprises. The requirement to publish the fee strategy at the start of last year, together with the actual amounts after the year end, is quite clear in the Funding Rules.

The SFA has the teeth, but does not use them.

The article points out a number of providers who have not complied, some surprisingly not even with the first part.

It is a contractual requirement. The solution is simple. DO NOT PAY THEM. Then audit them to check the validity of any figures they publish late.

David Neal

NEWS

Science museum hosts FE and skills technology talk

REBECCA COONEY & NICK GALE
NEWS@FEWEEK.CO.UK

Google glasses, YouTube and digital reward badges were all hot topics at a learning technology discussion group for FE practitioners at London's Science Museum on Monday (December 1).

Delegates at the Think Out Loud club, hosted by City & Guilds, heard from experts, tried out the latest technologies and explored the barriers to turning technology into learning tools.

The event was the second Think Out Loud club meeting, following the launch event in February. Among the speakers was Mark Riches, chief executive of learning website Makewaves, who talked about digital badges — small awards displayed on a website or CV, containing information about what the learner had to do to achieve them.

"Learning is no longer contained in any institutional place, learning happens all over the place," he said.

"So why not let everybody play and be rewarded for the little bits of learning that they do?" Although it was still "early days" he added he thought most CVs would contain badges as standard in the future.

"The value of badges is growing really quickly as more and more organisations — like O2, Amazon and Microsoft — seek to get connected with the learner," he said.

Warwickshire College chief technology officer Yousef Fouda spoke about online video platform YouTube, which, with Google



Bryan Mathers, chief executive of digital innovation company Wapisapa, addresses Think Out Loud club members and, inset, Mark Riches, chief executive of learning website Makewaves

glasses, could be used to create demonstration videos. But, he added: "Eighty per cent of employers Google applicants to screen them before interview. So YouTube offers learners the chance to promote themselves and show off their skills to the world."

The Further Education Learning Technology Action Group (Feltag) report, published in March, recommended all courses have a minimum of 10 per cent online delivery and in the discussion section of the event there was fierce debate over funding and whether it might lead to 'box-ticking'.

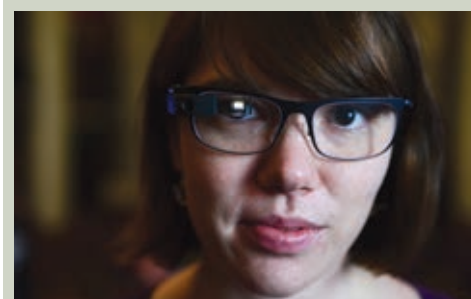
For City & Guilds managing director Kirstie

Donnelly, the discussion proved the highlight of the day.

"When you hear the energy, even at the end of the event, that's when you know you've had an impact and created some energy," she said.

Bryan Mathers, chief executive of Wapisapa, a not-for-profit digital innovation company, who, along with Ms Donnelly, hosted the event, said the aim of the day has been to "kick-start thinking".

"It's trying to drop people in the deep end and allow them to experience something and experiment in a safe way so they can say 'How can I bring that back to my college?'"



'How tech used is key'

Perhaps one of the best bits of the Think Out Loud Club was the chance to get hands-on with technology, including the Google Glass — an internet-connected pair of glasses with a camera and a tiny screen projected on to the lens.

Popping a pair on feels a little bit clunky, as one side is bigger than the other, but at the same time it feels incredibly cool to simply press your glasses, give a command and see information appear in front of you.

Having tried them I can't imagine sitting through an entire film without going cross-eyed, and they still feel like they're in the early stages of development.

But like many technologies, I think the most exciting things will be in what people choose to do with them — in the classroom, for example, creating demonstration videos, showing learners everything the teacher can — or something no one, not even Google, has thought of yet.

Rebecca Cooney
(pictured)

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Apprentice training clash after NI break for bosses

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Unions and business leaders have clashed over the issue of investment in training after Chancellor George Osborne announced the end of employers' National Insurance Contributions (NIC) for apprentices under 25.

Mr Osborne announced on Wednesday (December 3) that employers would no longer pay NICs for apprentices under 25 from 2016. It was already the case, after last year's Autumn Statement, that from April they won't have to pay NICs for apprentices under 21.

Neither concession extends to learners themselves though, prompting the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) to call for the employers' savings to go towards training.

But the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) insisted the concession must be recognised as an incentive.

Dr Mary Bousted (pictured), general Secretary of the ATL, said: "The purpose of apprenticeships should be to educate and train young people, not just to provide cheap labour for employers.

"We hope the government asks employers to put the NICs saving towards training their apprentices or developing apprenticeship training with colleges."

And Ingrid Waterfield, director in KPMG's People Powered Performance team, said: "The onus is now on employers to invest the money they would have spent on NICs on skills development, and talent management."

However, a CBI spokesperson responded: "Businesses already invest significant resources into apprenticeships through internal mentoring, wages and work foregone."

And National Hairdressers' Federation president Paul Curry said: "We applaud the Chancellor's



George Osborne

announcement that he will abolish the National Insurance 'jobs tax' on apprentices. This will potentially benefit the many, many hairdressers and barbers who already invest in youth training and employment."

Chris Jones, chief executive of City & Guilds, said: "This will incentivise employers to invest in young people and reduce the financial and administrative burden of doing so."

Employers currently make NICs for employees earning more than £153 a-week, although apprentices on the relevant National Minimum Wage (NMW) of £2.73 an-hour would not breach that threshold.

Joe Vinson, National Union of Students vice president for FE, said: "As apprentices are on such a low wage anyway, they won't reach the threshold to make NICs and receive things like sick pay or other benefits that employees on the NMW are entitled to."

Meanwhile, Association of Employment and Learning Providers chief executive Stewart Segal said he wanted the NIC exemption "applied in respect of all previously unemployed apprentices taken

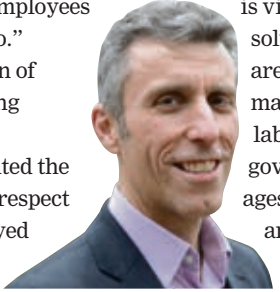
on by an employer".

Martin Doel, chief executive of the Association of Colleges, said: "Encouraging more employers to offer apprenticeships is important, but the government must work with colleges to ensure that employers are ready to take on apprentices."

But concerns have been raised that the autumn statement, which also included an announcement of £20m for careers advice, did not go far enough for adult learners.

David Hughes (pictured), chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education, said: "By making young people a priority there is a danger that the impending adult skills crisis will continue to threaten future economic prospects and limit social mobility.

"The focus on training for young people is vital, but is only one part of the solution. Over the next 10 years there are anticipated to be almost twice as many job vacancies as there will be new labour market entrants to fill them. The government must therefore support all ages if they are to achieve their central ambition of creating a 'more highly-skilled labour market'."



ALASTAIR THOMSON

Former principal policy and advocacy officer at the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education and ex-information officer at the Department of Education and Science

No 'judicious lollipops' from Chancellor Osborne as 'outlook remains gloomy for FE'

It wasn't meant to be like this of course. When the Coalition took office in 2010, the idea was to have halved the deficit by 2015/16, not to have to borrow £200m more than forecast just eight months ago in the budget. At this point in the electoral cycle, the intention was that the Chancellor would point to a job well-done and deliver some judicious lollipops to ensure triumph next May.

While the government can, rightly, point to better economic growth than the rest of the EU, falling unemployment and low inflation, the stark fact is that the recovery is desperately fragile and that tax revenues are way, way, lower than predicted.

Given this background, George Osborne's Autumn Statement deployed his undoubted political skills to make a silk purse from a sow's ear and the fact that post-school education and training featured at all is testament to the slowly growing recognition that FE and skills has political salience, although many in the sector will be frustrated that politicians fail to grasp the sector's potential to strengthen the economy and promote social mobility.

The decision to abolish employer National Insurance contributions for apprentices aged under 25 was evidence of the Chancellor's acumen — it makes a nice headline, signalling the government's goodwill

and commitment but actually costing the Treasury peanuts in terms of income foregone.

The announcement of £20m to improve careers advice and support for young people is another example of showing concern and being seen to be doing something without acknowledging that many of the problems in careers education, information and guidance have been of the Coalition's own making. The misguided decision of Michael Gove not to match Department for Business, Innovation and Skills funding for a National Careers Service with Department for Education cash was a massive error that £20m is not going to rectify although it does, at least, acknowledge that current policy has resulted in a total car-crash.

While the announcement of reforms to post-graduate funding will not affect most FE providers directly the fact is that, at a time of tightening budgets, every penny that goes to support the most educationally privileged is at the expense of others with more modest educational expectations.

As is often the case, some of the more interesting announcements are the single-sentence ones. An example of this is the three quarters of a million pounds allocated for a new National College for Onshore Oil and

Uncertainty over £20m for careers guidance

Plans to invest £20m in careers advice have been cautiously welcomed by the National Careers Council (NCC) amid uncertainty over where the money will be spent.

The Treasury said it could not go into detail on its plans for the funding — revealed in the Autumn Statement — but the NCC, which has highlighted a lack of consistency and availability in careers advice, said it was an "important step".

Chair Deirdre Hughes said: "This is an important step in the right direction. The key will be how the funds will be used to have the greatest impact and I will be very interested to see how the plans unfold.

"It would always be good to have more money. One of our three options we gave to government to improve services was costed at £17.5m, so £20m is a good step."

Martin Doel, chief executive of the Association of Colleges (AoC): "In announcing the investment of £20m to improve careers advice and support for young people the government must now ensure that careers education is part of the curriculum."

Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, said the £20m should be "spent on high quality face-to-face careers advice and guidance in every area of the country, training careers professionals, supporting partnerships with employer, rather than on IT-led solutions which don't work for many young people, particularly those with the greatest need".

The government will also pilot career-change work experience and training opportunities for older benefit claimants.

Gas. This is good news for Blackpool but also signals that the debate about fracking has moved from "whether" to "how?".

I was also intrigued by the announcement that "government will also work towards enabling greater multi-year certainty in funding for schools and certainty for adult education providers where appropriate, in the context of area based strategies". The whole localism agenda remains fluid and this is one announcement that needs unpacking.

Another 'straw in the wind' comes in the announcement that the Behavioural Research Centre for Adult Skills and Knowledge (ASK) will get £5m to conduct pilots using Children's Centres to provide employment support and access to basic skills training. This suggests that, at last, the government is starting to join-up its thinking around family learning.

It is also suggested that programmes to promote mid-life career reviews, are now influencing policy — from April 2015 the government has agreed to pilot career change work experience and training opportunities for older benefit claimants.

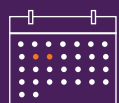
Overall though, the outlook remains gloomy for FE. Whichever party or parties form the next administration, the climate will remain austere and sector organisations will need to work together to defend budgets.



FE Week Annual Apprenticeship Conference and Exhibition 2015

Supporting apprenticeship providers during a time of major reform

DATE:



March 9 to 10, 2015

VENUE:



Venue: Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Westminster, London

Confirmed Speakers



Jennifer Coupland

Deputy Director, Joint Apprenticeships Unit, Department for business, Innovation and Skills/DFE



Nick Linford

Director of LSECT Ltd, former editor of FE Week



Sue Husband

Director of the National Apprenticeship Service

More speakers to be announced

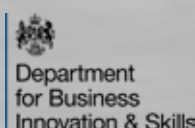
The FE Week Annual Apprenticeship Conference and exhibition 2015 (AAC2015) will provide an unprecedented opportunity for those involved with the delivery of apprenticeships to come together to learn, share and debate during a time of major reform and on the eve of a General Election.

Taking place on the first two days of National Apprenticeship Week (March 9 to 10, 2015) and in partnership with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the conference will offer a mixture of key note speeches from Government Ministers and Shadow Cabinet members, to in-depth practical sessions with Nick Linford and other technical specialists.

This is a not to be missed two-day policy and practice conference.

For more information and to register visit **feweekaac2015.co.uk**

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PROFILE



Although we didn't talk about them a lot and of course I didn't understand a lot of what my father was talking about, vocational qualifications were always part of my childhood

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

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Formula One racing has Graham and Damon Hill and football has Harry and Jamie Redknapp, while high-flying father and son duos in the world of acting include Donald and Kiefer Sutherland, to name but one.

But the world of qualifications is no exception to familial footstep following — it has Mike and Jeremy Benson.

The latter is the man in charge of Ofqual's vocational arm, while the former spent most of his career at City & Guilds.

"Although we didn't talk about them a lot and of course I didn't understand a lot of what he was talking about, vocational qualifications were always part of my childhood," says Benson, junior (Jeremy).

He adds: "My father did a range of different jobs, administrative jobs, organising different types of assessments. He worked in their international division for a while; he was responsible at various points for their land-

based qualifications."

The 40-year-old grew up in Bedford and now lives with wife Sue and their children — Naomi, aged 11, and Sam, nine — in Market Harborough where he is deputy chair of governors at Meadowdale Primary School.

And Benson says he enjoyed his own education in Bedfordshire's three-tier school system, doing well at "everything but PE".

He says: "From when I was in the lower sixth, I guess we were gently encouraged to set our sights high in terms of universities. I remember one of the teachers taking a mini-bus full of us to go to Oxford, so I was never sort of pushed or anything, but it was introduced to us as an opportunity that we ought to consider."

Benson studied at Lady Margaret Hall, which had been Oxford's first women's college, and emerged in 1995 with a 2.1 in politics, philosophy and economics.

After seeing an advert for an executive officer entry scheme at the Department for Education (DfE), he joined the civil service, where he successfully applied for the

graduate-entry fast stream. In 1999, after four years at the DfE, he became a team leader for finance.

Seconded to De Montford University as special projects manager from the end of 2002 to early 2004, Benson then returned to the DfE as a deputy director with responsibility for qualifications — a policy area which interests him to this day.

"There has clearly been quite a lot of change over time," he says. "Under the last government there was the introduction [of] diplomas and the reform to GCSEs and A-levels, and then over the lifetime of this government we have had further reforms, and now there's an increasing focus on apprenticeships."

"It's also interesting for me because it's not one of the most high-profile areas of education policy, which means there are opportunities to try and make some interesting things happen in an area that possibly hadn't been thought about in the past."

And so Benson today finds himself atop the Ofqual vocational division. It's a post he's

held since September, having previously been its policy director for nearly three years and before that director, strategic management, for just over a year.

But the possibility that he might end up working at the regulator, an organisation he helped to set up during Ed Ball's time as Education Secretary at the then-Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), did not initially occur to him.

He says: "My assumption had always been that once Ofqual had been set up that I would go and set up something else, go and find a different policy area to work on."

"It was set up in fairly challenging times, about a month before the 2010 general election, and obviously we had a completely new set of ministers who had some serious concerns about the way that education policy had been, and about standards and so on, so Ofqual was facing quite a challenging environment."

"So when the opportunity came up to apply for a director post here in the summer of 2010, I don't think they had particularly expected me to apply for it, but they were very pleased



It's a personal thing

What is your favourite book, and why?
Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. It's funny, tragic, moving and wonderfully well-written

What is your pet hate?
Bad driving

What do you do to switch off after work?
Going out with the family. Listening to Test Match Special. Football — Sam and I have season tickets for Leicester City this season. I am also mildly obsessive about classical music

If you could invite anyone, living or dead, to a dinner party who would it be?
Clement Attlee, Kenneth Clarke MP, Leonard Bernstein and Aung San Suu Kyi

What did you want to be when you were growing up?
A journalist. It combined two interests — writing and current affairs. But I don't think I'd have been very good at it

when I did, and obviously I was delighted to get the job.”

He adds: “Most of the thinking about the set-up of Ofqual had been driven by the DCSF, which was obviously the pre-19 side.

“The starting point was about how we build confidence in the standards of GCSEs and A-levels and so on.

“It was always going to have a role in relation to vocational qualifications as well. My previous job here was as director of policy, and I'd spent an increasing amount of time on vocational qualifications in that context because of the interest that [former Skills Minister] Matthew Hancock had on apprenticeships.

“We have a general qualifications directorate and a vocational qualifications directorate, and I actually applied for both, but the job I really wanted was the vocational one.

“There's so much really interesting and important work to do, and we're perhaps a little way behind in terms of developing the regulatory strategy in the vocational space.”

Benson seems optimistic about yet more

changes to the qualifications landscape, but has called for clarity when it comes to Functional Skills, and a focus on quality when looking at apprenticeships.

He says: “What we need in a sense from policy makers is clarity about where Functional Skills and other qualifications sit in the landscape, because that clarity of the policy context enables us to think about how we can then regulate the qualifications as effectively as possible.”

He adds: “Under the new apprenticeship model we will probably have an ongoing role regulating at least some of the end point assessments for the reformed apprenticeships, and it's our job to make sure that the assessments of those apprenticeships, whatever types of assessments they are, where we regulate them, are as good as they can be.

“If the numbers of apprenticeships are going to be increased because the government thinks that's a good thing, that's fine — but from our point of view that shouldn't lead to any compromise in terms of the quality of the assessments, or the standards that are set.”

Benson on holiday in California this year with wife Sue and son Sam



From left: Brothers Oliver and Tim, dad (Mike) and Benson. Building a wall outside their home in 1981



Benson on holiday in California this year with daughter Naomi

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THE INDY SCENE

John Hyde is the chairman of HIT Training, a hospitality training provider that operates across England, and on the second Monday of every month he writes in *FE Week* about issues affecting independent learning providers



I had mixed emotions when I heard Skills Minister Nick Bowles's new apprentice set off the security alarms on his first day of work at Portcullis House. This also involved the evacuation of Westminster Underground station. I had a similar experience, too.

Many years ago when as a young 16-year-old trainee hotel manager working as a commis chef, I set fire to a chip pan which resulted in Birmingham New Street Station being evacuated. The Queens Hotel, now demolished, had its kitchens at platform level of New Street Station.

Whatever fees an FE provider charges its sub-contractors, the services offered must be listed and the prices justified to avoid the colleges and independent providers involved giving our sector more bad publicity

While I quickly extinguished the flames from my pan, the grease and dirt in the ventilation system caught fire and spread the length of the hotel and emerged in the British Railways buffet at the far end of the platform.

A major alert evacuated the station and at that time the Post Office sorting office below the station. To add to the chaos, all signals controlling the main line trains speeding to Birmingham were put to red.

Needless to say, the British Rail bosses no longer considered me suitable management material, but I was offered a job as a chef at three times my trainee salary.

HIT scooped another award last week getting into 'The Times and Investec Mid-Market 100 fastest growing private companies' in the UK, albeit at number 97.

At the awards ceremony, one of the speakers was Sherry Coutu CBE, who holds directorships in the London Stock Exchange,

Zoopla, Cambridge University Press and LinkedIn among others. She outlined her research and forthcoming report into the importance of government 'supporting high growth firms to scale-up their operations rather than concentrating on new start-ups'.

A statistic that amazed me was that while the mid-market private companies with a turnover of £10m-plus only account for 1 per cent of all listed companies at Companies House, they collectively employ 25 per cent of the working population in the private sector.

Indeed, this UK mid-market generates nearly £1tn annually and employs six million people.

So when colleges and providers are looking to engage with local employers, engaging with those in the mid-market sector would have the most beneficial growth to the local economy.

I am glad *FE Week* has tackled the thorny problem of sub-contracting fees [see edition 119]. When we started HIT eight years ago we obtained two small Learning and Skills Council Train to Gain contracts in the West of England and London and in the rest of the country relied on 42 sub-contracts from FE colleges. Their fees ranged from 10 per cent to 40 per cent and in those days they offered no support services at all.

Whatever fees an FE provider charges its sub-contractors, the services offered must be listed and the prices justified to avoid the colleges and independent providers involved giving our sector more bad publicity.

I am glad FE Week has tackled the thorny problem of sub-contracting fees

Sub-contracting to primes in the Department for Work and Pensions is well-regulated and transparent.

Ironically, the Education Funding Agency has no data on its sub-contractors, although this may change now it has a joint chief executive with the Skills Funding Agency (SFA).

The SFA has a duty to make sub-contracting transparent and the fees levied explained to provide value for money otherwise we will have another plethora of Channel 4 or Panorama type programmes and angry national press articles rubbishing the sector.



DR SALLY MESSENGER

Director WorldSkills projects, North Warwickshire & Hinckley College

Going global to benefit local

A new report looks at how UK general FE colleges are reaping the VET (vocational education and training) rewards of taking part in WorldSkills competitions, explains Dr Sally Messenger.

The 2014 Skills Show and Association of Colleges (AoC) conference gave a very important message: future VET success depends on global standards underpinning higher level skills development.

In Global standards: bridging the skills gap, published by North Warwickshire & Hinckley College, one of the case studies outlines how at government level, China's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and our Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, supported by British Council (China), are committed to sharing and aligning elements of technical and vocational education and training.

They have joint interest in using the global standards embedded within the WorldSkills competition as a mode of development. Since 2010 the collaboration has delivered skills roadshows, exchanges of WorldSkills experts and support for college-to-college partnerships.

We need fresh thinking on developing professional VET teachers as global skill leaders, a model well-illustrated by WorldSkills experts

More recently the partnership has encompassed the delivery of standards workshops in alignment with the direction signalled by Premier Li Keqiang.

WorldSkills competitions are increasingly gaining recognition as a beacon of aspiration for 'skills excellence' within the UK VET system. Within WorldSkills International (WSI), strategy also includes how the standards, within the competition, can add value through a wider and deeper reach into global vocational and education training systems.

Following the success of WorldSkills London 2011, the Skills Funding Agency recognised the opportunity to build on the momentum of the achievements of Team UK through investing in a suite of five Legacy Projects which have subsequently been transferred to Find a Future.

One of the projects, contracted through the

AoC, was to use WSI standards to support the drive to increase high level technical skills.

A national team, based at North Warwickshire & Hinckley College, has been working on the project in collaboration with WSI for the past two years.

A key outcome of the Project is Global standards: bridging the skills gap which provides a set of case studies, designed to act as a catalyst for 'skill standards ambition' within the UK.

The focus of the publication is on providing examples of how the concept of aspirational standards and 'stretch' can be taken forward by governments, industry and business, further/higher education, private training providers, sector skills councils and awarding organisations, among others.

The concerns and opportunities that emerge include, not surprisingly, the increasing importance of relevant and current industry and business-led standards; the need to support an internationally competitive economy through clear links with global standards; and our collective dependency on 'cutting edge' programmes linked to appropriate systems for updating, quality and regulation.

New College Lanarkshire provides an example of the many practical ways in which WorldSkills standards can raise capacity to engage and meet modern industry needs in engineering design and in so doing adapt teaching, learning and assessment practice.

Similarly Middlesex University has, since 2007, been championing WorldSkills standards, project-based learning and assessments to drive innovative programmes in mechatronics, electronics and robotics within its degrees and in courses at Tottenham University Technical College, for which the university is a sponsor.

Focussed investment in the professionalism of our VET teachers is vital — the combination of their leading edge technical and pedagogy skills. With the many changes taking place in the sector we need fresh thinking on developing professional VET teachers as global skill leaders, a model well illustrated by WorldSkills experts.

Continuing technical upskilling, linked to programme development, is the prerequisite for a world class VET system. One case study outlines how the Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT) has been undertaking research with representatives from the hairdressing and barbering sector with the aim of providing deep skills development for VET teachers.

As a report by McKinsey & Company, in 2007, stated: 'The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.'

Email skills.projects@nwhc.ac.uk for more about the project and to get a copy of the report.

Devolution of skills funding to city regions could be the key to solving local skills shortages, according to Mark Farrar

Shadow Skills Minister Liam Byrne, at last month’s Association of Colleges conference, floated the idea that skills funding should be devolved to city regions. This proposal is similar to a key recommendation from an AAT-commissioned report by the Centre for Economics and Business Research entitled Apprenticeships for the Future.

City regions should be better placed to know what skills shortages there are in their region and could implement a more targeted approach to tackling them

It advises there should be a greater focus on the local ownership of skills education and funding. Taking such an approach locally could help ensure that local labour skills match the current and future demands of the local job market.



MARK FARRAR
Chief Executive of AAT (Association of Accounting Technicians)

City solution to the skills shortage conundrum

While apprenticeships are increasingly becoming a success story, geographical coverage is uneven and elements of funding — such as the standard rates for training providers — still operate on a one-size-fits-all basis. Despite innovative thinking on how to drive demand, a traditionalist centralised approach to funding remains.

Regional disparities in new apprenticeship starts highlight why this funding model needs improvement. The North East, which had 35,870 apprenticeship starts last year, has one of the highest levels of youth unemployment at 27 per cent.

While there may not be a direct correlation between the two, more apprenticeships could help improve the employment prospects of young people in the region.

At the same time, there are industries suffering from acute skills shortages, such as construction and ICT, which show no signs of abating. In fact they look set to get worse as apprenticeship numbers in both have dropped, with ICT apprenticeships falling by 28 per cent between 2010/11 and 2012/13,

while construction new starts reached a ten-year low.

City regions could play a key role in addressing such issues by determining where funding for skills should go. They should be better placed to know what skills shortages there are in their region and could implement a more targeted approach to tackling them.

Government proposals to reform the funding model for apprenticeships offer an opportunity to deliver this devolved funding model. By targeting funding at priority sectors, emerging skills gaps, and addressing geographical imbalances, apprentices can provide the skills that the UK economy will need to continue to grow.

How can this funding approach be achieved? Better data is required below regional level to allow skills shortages and certain types of unemployment to be targeted. Government departments and agencies should examine how they currently record data and seek to use business surveys, and other techniques, to

help map skills shortages at a local level. Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) could also have a major role to play. There is currently much regional variation in their capacity and capability to ensure effective delivery. This is something that would need to be resolved so that all are empowered to deliver effectively for their city region.

To be successful, funding policy should also reflect the changing needs of the economy. As the system moves towards employer contributions, it should differentiate between types of apprenticeship, offering greater funding incentives for places that address identified skills shortages.

Conversely, higher employer contributions may be sustainable where needs are already being met.

But let’s not rush at this, to achieve the desired change the government should consult further with employers and providers about the details of its new funding mechanism before going ahead. A new system provides a crucial opportunity to target incentives at priority sectors and locations where additional places would provide the greatest economic benefit.

The impact of the changes should also be monitored closely after introduction to make sure that skill shortages, as they are identified, are addressed.

There has been a huge increase in the number of apprentices in recent years, which has helped businesses and transformed lives. Now we must look to ensure that all areas of the country benefit fully, with apprenticeships that deliver what the UK needs to drive economic growth.



IOAN MORGAN
Interim principal, Lewisham Southwark College

Going back to ‘college’ with lessons from Lesoco

In January 2013, *FE Week* was first to report that the merged Lewisham and Southwark colleges, in South London, would be renaming to Lesoco. And just over two months ago, we exclusively revealed the cost — and unpopularity — of the £290k new brand. Ioan Morgan explains why the merged college is called Lesoco no more.

You can change the signs, the logos and the title on your website — but you have only succeeded in changing the name in practical terms if you have convinced the public to refer to you by your new title. As interim principal, I found that Lesoco had many issues around identity. The name just wasn’t working for us. It was just too obscure. That said, there was some logic to the name. It draws on the original merged college’s title. Some would argue it has a

trendy feel — like Soho in London, or Tribeca in New York — and that this would inspire our potential customers by projecting an image which is non-stodgy, aspirational and even “cool”.

Cool, perhaps, but clearly not popular with learners, stakeholders and staff.

It was described variously as unintelligible, obscure, confusing, pretentious and as the manifestation of a corporate mid-life crisis. Apart from that, people really liked it.

Of course, if the college had a multi-million pound budget to educate potential customers — as Norwich Union did in the transition to Aviva, or Arthur Anderson to Accenture — it might, just possibly, have worked.

Even then, it would be hard to see that the novelty of the new title would compensate for losing the reference to the locations we serve.

Unlike Aviva and Accenture, we are not a national or international business. Our location is everything to us and, of course,

it is everything to our communities. In addition, we enjoy enormous support from the local boroughs.

In any case, we weren’t going to spend that sort of money. If we did, and if we wanted to improve the college’s image, we’d have done better spending the money on paint.

It is now possible to mention the name of the college to a cab driver without being met by a blank face

So the decision was made to revert to Lewisham Southwark College, which we did in steps. First by extending the Lesoco logo so the old name was kept alive until we had formal permission for the change from the Secretary of State. Second by beginning a rebrand of all our materials once permission was forthcoming, and this we are now doing.

Quietly and confidently, we are reverting back to a title almost identical to the original Lewisham and Southwark College. In doing so, we recapture the credibility we previously enjoyed from being associated with two colleges with pedigree which

preceded our merger.

On a practical level, it is now possible to mention the name of the college to a cab driver without being met by a blank face. You know a rebranding exercise has failed if you can’t get a cab to the college without resorting to its previous, original title before the driver knows what you’re talking about.

It would have been easy — although foolhardy — to keep up the pretence that we believed in our new “trendy” title. This would have enabled us to save face and to escape some criticism. It is a small price to pay for making the right decision.

The challenge now is to ensure the new name reflects a brand that is a promise of community relevance, employability and student-centred values.

FE Week saw the issue with the new title, sometimes that’s the push we need for change.

Of all of the announcements I’ve made to staff, none has been welcomed with more enthusiasm than when I told them that we were scrapping the Lesoco name.

You might argue there’s more to worry about than just the college’s name, but actually I think there’s something much deeper here.

The college is going through a period of change and improvement, and there are challenges ahead — but we still want to celebrate the best of our past.

We have staff who are proud to associate themselves with the college and we have many supporters and partners in the communities we serve who feel the same way.

CAMPUS ROUND-UP

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Zoo license granted to college



Bickton College has been granted a zoo licence allowing it to show its collection of exotic animals to the public.

The Devon-based college opened an animal husbandry school in March for animal care, husbandry and conservation courses, which was paid for with a £2,880,000 grant from the Skills Funding Agency.

It contains a number of animal enclosures and paddocks that house animals including ring tail lemurs, alpacas, chinchillas, skunks, snakes, terrapins and spiders.

The college has now been granted a zoo licence.

Sue Merrett, head of animal care, said: “Our plan is to open for programmed education events for schools, youth and community groups and themed activities including junior keeper and face your phobia days.

“Our students will take a primary role in handling the animals and presenting to the public, providing them with extra experience and real-world training to further embellish the skills they present to future employees.”

Green award for ‘E-Collegey’ scheme



Uxbridge College took the Best Newcomer title in the national Green Gown Awards which recognise sustainability initiatives by education institutions.

The college was recognised for its E-Collegey initiative launched two years ago to boost staff and student interest in green issues.

Activities have included car-sharing and cycle purchase and maintenance schemes to limit the number of people driving to and from college.

There was also a ‘sustainable’ movie-themed fashion show where all the outfits were adapted from clothes bought in charity shops.

Learners also ran a ‘Shift it and Gift it’ sale where staff and students brought in toys, books and other potential gift items they no longer needed to sell at college, which raised around £400 for the Michael Sobell Hospice in nearby Hillingdon.

Lorraine Collins, executive director of enterprise and development, said: “It was really nice to be recognised with an award.

“We wanted a sustainable focus in the college and thought the best way to do that would be to create a clear brand that everyone recognised.

“Teams of students now wear high visibility jackets showing the logo when they do sustainable work around the college, like picking up litter and planting flowers.”

Walk for hospital that saved ‘little miracle’

A Darlington College learner organised a 33-mile trek along Hadrian’s Wall to raise funds for a hospital unit that saved the life of her younger brother.

Abbie Taylor, aged 17, and more than 20 other uniformed and public services extended diploma learners spent two days walking the length of the wall built by the Romans in 122AD from West Cumbria to Northumberland to keep out Scottish invaders.

They raised £1,200 in sponsorship for Freeman Hospital, in Newcastle, where her seven-year-old brother, Finlay, was treated as a baby.

When Finlay was born, x-rays showed that his heart was the size of a five-year-old’s.

Doctors found that he had a dangerously narrow aorta and performed a life-saving operation.

Abbie said: “Finlay was so poorly. He could have died in his sleep at any time.

“Now he is great — just like an annoying little brother should be.

“When our tutor asked us to choose a charity we all jumped at the chance of helping the hospital.

“The walk was tough and we got soaked through but it was well worthwhile.”

Finlay said: “It is amazing to think I could have died.

“When I go for my check-ups they call me the little miracle.”



Above: Abbie Taylor (second from right) with other Darlington College uniformed and public services students ahead of the walk. Above left: Finlay today with his mum Gayle Taylor Above right: Finlay Taylor as a baby

Grant pays for anti-bullying training



Learners from Coventry-based Hereward College’s peer support team received anti-bullying training.

The team, which was launched in 2005 to help first year students adjust to college life, received a £1,500 grant from coffee retailer Starbucks. It paid for a two-day visit from the The Diana Award Anti-Bullying Training Team, launched in memory of the former Princess of Wales, which taught the

Members of the peer support team who did the anti-bullying training

22 learners how to change the behaviour of bullies.

Level two ICT learner Warren Fletcher, aged 17, said: “The training was very helpful. It gave us the skills we need to deal with bullying — which are confidence, listening and communication.”

The grant will also fund a film showcasing the team’s anti-bullying work.

Looking back 100 years to when apprentices could be jailed for 'idleness'

New research by a Lincoln university professor of history, commissioned by the Skills Funding Agency (SFA), shows how apprenticeships have changed since the outbreak of the First World War, writes Paul Offord.

Today's apprentices might expect to be hauled before their employer or tutor if they are not pulling their weight — but not a judge.

As part of the government's Made by Apprentices 1914 to 2014 campaign, the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) commissioned professor of history at the University of Lincoln Krista Cowman to study historical records and prepare an overview of early 20th Century apprenticeships.

Professor Cowman found that apprentices who, according to their bosses, were performing below par a century ago could be summoned to appear in court.

It could be for turning up late, being "idle" or just having a bad attitude and could even result in a prison sentence.

The report, which will be published online later this month, stated: "By 1914 law was becoming the last resort for employers... 'Idle' apprentices still occasionally appeared before the Chamberlain's Court in London where the maximum punishment for this crime remained a term of three months in the Bridewell."

It added apprentices who failed to fulfil



Apprentices in a brass foundry in North East England in 1914. Inset: A female apprentice working in an iron foundry at around the same time

Edward Padgett (third from right) with his staff who are all past apprentices.

Arthur Padgett

were also being brought before the courts in other parts of the country at that time.

A selection of photos of apprentices taken around 100 years ago in North East England were released to coincide with the campaign, launched as part of commemorations of the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, that aims to help boost awareness of apprenticeships among young people and employers and show how they have changed.

It was supported by Edward Padgett, owner of Arthur Padgett plumbing business

in Lancashire, which started trading almost 100 years ago and was founded by his grandfather,

Arthur Padgett.

He said: "My grandfather started as an apprentice in plumbing over a century ago.

"Since then our trade has evolved enormously, but the need for skilled labour is still as relevant today. That's why we continue to support apprenticeships."

Sue Husband, director of apprenticeships at the National Apprenticeship Service, said: "We urge employers to take stock on what has been achieved in the last century and consider how apprenticeships could help

their business deliver for years to come."

Professor Cowman's research allowed the SFA to compare the 10 most popular apprenticeships in 1914 with those of today

Traditional trades including dress making, carpentry and millinery dominated back then, but it is more varied today with health and social care, business administration and management at the top (see feweek.co.uk for the full lists).

There were 851,500 people taking part in apprenticeships in 2013/14 across all ages and all levels, according to government figures in last month's Statistical First Release, compared to around 192,000 in 1914, according to the SFA.

Most apprentices in 1914 started work aged 15 to 17, according to the report. But nowadays the 25+ age group is home to the greatest number of starts, at 161,600. For 16 to 18 in 2013/14 the figure was 119,800.

Funding arrangements also differed in 1914, as apprentices were "indentured" — which meant they were legally required to work for an employer for a number of years and had to pay a fee to their employer to cover the cost of training and tools.

DO YOU WANT TO BE IN CAMPUS ROUND-UP?

Send your stories with pictures to campus@feweek.co.uk including names, ages and course details of students where applicable

& MOVERS SHAKERS

Your weekly guide to who's new and who's leaving

Half a dozen new directors have been appointed at Weston College, in Somerset.

The new appointments include Andy Davidson, as executive director for strategic intervention; Liz Redwood, as enterprise and commercial development director for data compliance, funding; and, Fiona Quick, as external partnership director.

Jo Watson assumes the role of new business opportunities executive director; Darran George is multi-academy trust executive director and Barbara Titmuss takes on assistant director of inclusivity, leading on the Bristol Futures Academy — a multi-academy trust created and sponsored by the college.

Principal Dr Paul Phillips said: "Competition for these posts was extremely strong and I believe the team we have now will complement and take forward this outstanding college.

"We have seen exceptional levels of enrolments for both Further and Higher Education with yet another success at the

North Somerset Business Awards.

"The strategic plan is all about putting learners first and we have focussed on consolidating key aspects of our business as well as developing a multi-academy trust model the college can sponsor."

Meanwhile, Derby College has appointed a new vice principal to lead on curriculum strategy.

Richard Deane joins Derby College from Warwickshire College, where he was vice principal — curriculum innovation.

He started his working life as a personal trainer and combined this with his passion for music, which took him around the UK and Europe as a drummer with several bands including progressive rock band Ark and also touring with Kirk Brandon and Spear of Destiny.

At the age of 20, he was put in charge of a sports centre in Tamworth — supporting a pioneering active learning programme to support 30 apprentices.

He later joined Sutton College in Birmingham as a sports lecturer — working



From left to right: Jo Watson, Fiona Quick, Andy Davidson, Liz Redwood and Darran George. Not pictured: Barbara Titmuss

with employers on developing Training for Work programmes.

A move to North Birmingham College was followed by a head of department role at Solihull College in 2001 where he remained until 2010 when he moved to Sheffield College as assistant principal. He was also appointed as a part-time Ofsted inspector in 2005.

"Education lured me away from the rock star life. However, those early days taught me important skills that I took into business and my career in the FE sector such as being flexible and entrepreneurial to recognise and take advantage of new opportunities," he said.



Richard Deane

If you want to let us know of any new faces at the top of your college, training provider or awarding organisation please let us know by emailing news@feweek.co.uk



Finding the right person for our strategic future

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- Managing cash flow and borrowing
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You will also be expected to demonstrate the ability to:

- Innovatively and effectively manage complex management information and reporting systems (MIS and IT)
- Identify future property needs and developing a property strategy

The successful candidate will hold a full CCAB accountancy qualification (ACA, ACCA, CIPFA, CIMA)

CLOSING DATE: 12PM ON MONDAY 12 JANUARY 2015
INTERVIEWS: 26 & 27 JANUARY 2015



The College is an integral part of the West Suffolk community and has an excellent reputation which extends to national and regional as well as local partners. With an annual turnover of £25 million, West Suffolk College delivers exceptional success to thousands of students.

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forward looking staff and an impressive team ethos, **putting students and their success at the heart of everything we do.**

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The team is responsible for maximising sales, meeting defined sales targets and developing our reputation as the partner of choice for software and technology related products and services. The team works with an internally based sales team to drive through proactive campaigns and lead generation. Working in the work based learning market, you will be responsible for key account relationships, account management, delivery of the quota and developing business with new and existing accounts at all levels.

Knowledge and experience of sales planning is required as well as an understanding of the factors affecting the UK education, training and learning sectors. Knowledge of Maytas or a similar solution is highly advantageous and experience of the work based learning or further education markets is preferred.

If you are interested in finding out more about this exciting role, please contact Nigel James, Sales Manager for an informal chat. Nigel can be reached at nigel.james@tribalgroup.com or 07796 274994.

To apply, please visit our vacancies page where you can search for this vacancy and apply online

www.tribalgroup.com/aboutus/workingfortribal/Pages/Vacancies.aspx

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An excellent communicator, organiser and confident decision maker you will also have management experience in a residential environment. If you are someone that really enjoys working with and influencing young people and have energy and enthusiasm for this rewarding but demanding role then we would like to hear from you.

Closing date: 18th December 2014
Interview date: 8th January 2015

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Any queries, telephone 01964 504190 or email: great.jobs@bishopburton.ac.uk.

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The College is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and vulnerable adults and expects all staff to share this commitment. An enhanced DBS check will be carried out on the successful candidate. Bishop Burton College is committed to Equal Opportunities for all.



Head of Development & Delivery

Closing date: Tuesday 16 December 2014

Salary: £65,000 per annum, plus benefits (inc. London weighting)

Location: King's Cross, London

This new role will be a key appointment for Creative Skillset, building on the development of existing services/programmes of work as well as initiating and driving through to delivery new services and employer campaigns.

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This is a fixed term position until 31 March 2016.

Please note that CVs are not accepted.

Application deadline: 12pm, Tuesday 16 December 2014

All applicants must apply via our website at: http://creativeskillset.org/about_us/jobs_at_creative_skillset/3239_head_of_development_delivery

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To apply, please send a CV and covering letter for the attention of Julia Martin, Head of Human Resources:

By post: Riverside College, Kingsway Campus, Kingsway, Widnes WA8 7QQ

By email: julia.martin@riverside.ac.uk **Deadline for applications is the 7th January 2015**

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For an application pack, please contact bridget.randall@oneawards.org.uk

For questions concerning this post please contact Louise Morritt, Chief Executive at louise.morritt@oneawards.org.uk

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Closing date: 15 January 2015 Interview date: 23 January 2015



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Principal and Chief Executive c. £150,000 Edinburgh

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We are now seeking to appoint a new Principal to take the College forward, and ensure that we remain in a position to meet the challenges of a dynamic sector. A credible candidate will have experience of working with business, building partnerships, and making strategic goals an economic and financial reality.

An outstanding communicator and inspirational leader, the successful candidate will be required to build on our strong and diverse range of external stakeholders, and position the College as a key business partner. You should have an exceptional track record of leadership and management in complex and multi-faceted organisations, and be strongly committed to working within the College's values. You must demonstrate a passion for education, and for working with learners to help them achieve their maximum potential. This role presents an exciting opportunity for an individual with vision, drive, and enthusiasm to lead the College.

Please visit www.aspenpeople.co.uk/edinburghcollege for more information or call Donogh O'Brien or Katy Gall on 0141 212 7555 for a confidential discussion.



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Applicants for all of the positions should be able to adapt teaching and learning strategies and select resources as appropriate in order to meet student needs. They should have excellent communication and interpersonal skills and have the ability to lead, develop and motivate adult students to achieve their learning goals. Excellent record keeping skills and the ability to demonstrate relevant ICT skills including Word, Excel, PowerPoint, E-mail and Internet will also be needed.

Please call Christina Chacksfield on 01293 853473 for an informal discussion or e-mail cjchacksfield@aspire Sussex.org.uk



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Accrington and Rossendale (AccRoss) College exists to provide high quality education and training to the widest range of local people.



RECRUITING FUNCTIONAL SKILLS TUTORS IN MATHS AND ENGLISH

The Skills Network, a leading training provider, is currently recruiting full and part-time flexible Functional Skills tutors, to support learners while they work to complete our blended learning Functional Skills/GCSE qualification in English and Maths.

ABOUT THE ROLE

As a Functional Skills tutor you will be responsible for providing face to face support to learners in half-day sessions at a local venue. Tutors will also provide remote/online subject specific support to learners, as well as providing encouragement and feedback with the assistance of Learner Support and Retention Advisors. You will be required to liaise with the Learner Support Advisors in our office, regarding support for learners and any areas of concern. Once appointed you will need to attend an induction/training day at a Mercia venue.

WHAT QUALIFICATIONS DO YOU NEED?

All applicants are expected to hold a relevant qualification in the following areas:

- A teaching qualification PTTLS/CTTLS/DTTLS/Cert Ed/ PGCE or equivalent (or working towards)
- Level 3 in Maths and/or English
- Experience in supporting the delivery of functional skills in FE.

To apply for a role, please visit **www.theskillsnetwork.com** to download an application form and send your completed form to **careers@theskillsnetwork.com**

NOCN FLYING HIGH

NOCN has partnered with NATS, the UK's leading provider of air traffic control services to provide a suite of qualifications that help students obtain their student Air Traffic Controller licence.

Training includes theory and practical simulated experience relevant to the course and is for both European and international students.

These new qualifications will be a welcome addition to NOCN's growing portfolio of specialist and higher apprenticeship qualifications.

NOCN create and develop quality, flexible qualifications for organisations that offer education and training to their students, members or staff in areas such as: health and social care, housing, construction, security, facilities management, horticulture, hospitality, manufacturing and engineering.

Call **0114 227 0500**

Email **business-enquiries@nocn.org.uk**

Visit **www.nocn.org.uk**

Follow us on Facebook **NOCN1** and Twitter **@nocn1**



nocn
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES



NOCN IS ONE OF ONLY 21 ORGANISATIONS, AND THE ONLY AWARDING ORGANISATION, TO ACHIEVE LEVEL 3 IN LEADERS IN DIVERSITY PRESENTED BY THE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR DIVERSITY



FE Week Sudoku challenge

How to play: Fill in all blank squares making sure that each row, column and 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

7			2		5			6
	1			4			8	
9								4
	6		5		1		9	
		1				2		
	9		8		7		4	
1								2
	3			8			5	
5			9	4				8

Difficulty:
EASY

			3			2		
9		6	1			5		
	8	5						
		9	8		4			3
	3						9	
5			7		3	8		
						3	6	
		3			2	9		4
		4			1			

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Solutions:
Next week

Last Week's solutions

5	1	6	3	2	9	8	7	4
4	3	7	5	1	8	9	2	6
9	8	2	6	4	7	3	1	5
8	2	3	4	5	1	6	9	7
7	4	1	8	9	6	5	3	2
6	5	9	7	3	2	1	4	8
2	7	5	9	8	3	4	6	1
3	6	4	1	7	5	2	8	9
1	9	8	2	6	4	7	5	3

Difficulty:
EASY

5	1	8	3	7	9	6	2	4
9	7	3	4	6	2	8	5	1
2	6	4	1	5	8	9	7	3
8	4	1	9	2	7	3	6	5
3	2	5	6	8	1	7	4	9
7	9	6	5	3	4	2	1	8
1	3	2	7	9	5	4	8	6
6	5	7	8	4	3	1	9	2
4	8	9	2	1	6	5	3	7

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Spot the difference
to WIN an FE Week mug!



Spot five differences. First correct entry wins an FE Week mug. Text your name and picture of your completed spot the difference to 07969 166 374.